

# COUNSELOR™

## Operations Management

### I Resolve To ...

*By Ty Freyvogel*

**Here are eight nagging details business owners must handle when the New Year rolls around.**

If you're like most small business owners, you've got a huge list of "to-dos" that stay perpetually on the back burner. You know, like fixing the filing system that currently consists of two piles labeled (at least in your mind) "Hot" and "Procrastinate." Or addressing that long-neglected employee problem. Or bringing your embarrassingly outmoded Web site up-to-date. Now's the time to tackle that back burner list with a vengeance. Make taking care of these tasks your 2007 New Year's business resolution.

There's something psychologically satisfying about starting a new year by taking care of all of those things that you've been putting off the year before. You'll find the beginning of the year is a good time to start purging your back burner list. Do it, and you will be surprised about how much more smoothly your company will run throughout the year to come.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, take a deep breath. I have put together a checklist of eight items that every business should take a look at in order to get everything set for your business year 2007. Here it is:

Review all your systems from top to bottom. Carefully examine what is working and what isn't. Decide where the problems are and figure out what can be fixed. You might be able to fix them yourself, or you might need outside guidance. Maybe you need a computer expert to help you use the technology more efficiently or maybe you need a financial expert to improve the way you do your books. Whatever you do, don't assume anything. Don't assume that just because you have had a certain system in place from day one that it is adding value to your business or your customers.

Review all vendor contracts. Take a look at how much business you are doing with each vendor. Are you getting the best rates based on how much you are working together? Is the relationship mutually beneficial for you and for them? If not, don't be afraid to make a change. If you're happy with your vendors, on the other hand, take the time to tell them. Let vendors know that you want to create an even closer relationship with them – you'd be surprised to learn how cost-effective such a gesture can be.

Determine who your best customers are. Your best customers often aren't who you think they are. Examine all your customers through a profitability lens. Just because you

always seem to be doing something for certain customers doesn't mean they're the most profitable. When reviewing my customers, I often find that my needy customers and my most profitable customers are two different groups. Of course, you should treat all customers well – but when you determine who the best ones are, it will become clear where most of your efforts should go.

Hold annual performance reviews. Discuss with your employees what they can do to help the company run more smoothly in the year to come. Also, take the opportunity to find out what they feel most passionate about in their work, and ask if there is another part of the business in which they'd like to play a larger role. Always be honest with them and take the time to listen to their concerns one-on-one.

Engage your employees as partners. The best people to help you solve problems, particularly those involving customers, are the ones who experience them on a daily basis. That's right. Your employees are a (possibly untapped) wellspring of ideas on how you can make your customers happier. Kick off the year with a meeting designed to get them to share those ideas. Listening to and implementing your employees' suggestions is a great way to make them feel like valued business partners.

Do an early spring cleaning. Purge your office. It's time to get rid of all of that stuff that you either don't need or that doesn't work anymore. Your employees will like working in a cleaner environment. Chances are they – and you – will be happier and more productive. It's depressing to be surrounded by clutter. Clean up and everyone may enjoy a boost in energy and creativity.

Overhaul your Web site. In the same way that retail stores move around their floor sets, you need to make changes to your Web site to keep people coming back. Make sure all of your information is updated, and post any articles that have recently mentioned your work. Set your company's Web site as the home page on your browser. That way every time you go online you will notice it. This serves as a great constant reminder that you need to keep making updates and improvements.

Consider technology upgrades. If you need new computers or a new phone system to help things run more smoothly, the beginning of the year is a great time to make those upgrades. A new computer, phone system or other technology upgrade can make a huge difference in the daily lives of your employees. Just be sure that everyone gets the appropriate training on the new technology.

This may seem like a large list, but most of the items are easy to do. Like most things you procrastinate on, they aren't painful at all once you jump in. Make dealing with your "back burner" list your New Year's resolution and you'll be amazed at how liberated you feel.

*Ty Freyvogel is the head of consulting firm Freyvogel Communications. He is also the author of *It's Not Your Smarts, It's Your Schmooze and Seize the Century!*, as well as public speaker. He can be reached at his Web site, [www.EntrepreneursLab.com](http://www.EntrepreneursLab.com).*